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Surveying the state's future

Last week, interestingly on July 4, Robert Healey Jr., a gadfly former political candidate from Barrington, posed some provocative questions for Rhode Island politicians that he felt the voting public should ask before the next vote for governor, but it seems to me they might apply to any person running for a state office. Best of all, they made me stop and think about the specifics of what I hate about our current government in Rhode Island and what I think it might be capable of if voters would give those who might be willing to heal our serious flaws a real chance. So let's go through the questions, which I have tried to answer at least for myself.

1. Which do you support more, the governor's budget or the General Assembly's budget? Neither fully, because both are flawed. I can't pretend to be a "budget" person but believe priorities are skewed on both sides.

2. What three initiatives would you introduce to help end the state's fiscal crisis? (Ten words per initiative.) Cut payroll without regard to political connection; priority, job value. Increase tax base by improving business climate and reining in union influences. Level fund current payroll and require some percentage co-pay for health care.

3. What is the top priority for Rhode Island government today? Cutting taxes.

4. Where will Rhode Island be in two years? Five years? Without drastic changes on many levels in deeper debt in two years and possibly bankruptcy in five years.

5. Yes or no: Should state re-

Thoughts on the passing scene



by
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open teacher contracts on the local level? Teacher contracts should be mostly level throughout the state with only exceptions incentive bonuses for those willing to teach in inner-city schools with higher challenges and problems. We should absolutely move toward state-wide education system or at the very least county control. It is ridiculous to be funding 39 cities and towns with multiple administrations in such a small state.

6. Where, if at all, would you cut social services? No cuts to child services, education out of poverty or to needy elderly, infirm or mentally ill. Cuts to adult welfare or require work for job training or to fill menial state needs.

7. What is your position on the governor's layoff plan? Great idea! Get rid of all political and union-backed employment.

8. Yes or no: Should the General Assembly listen to the governor and halt pay raises for state workers? For the time being, yes.

9. Yes or no: Should Rhode Island privatize its work force to the fullest extent possible? Qualified yes. Meaning, after

careful determination that privatization doesn't backfire by excessive charges to agency providing workers and because it is an excellent means of getting rid of union domination. Unions are good because they protect good workers and require fair treatment. They are bad when they become politically controlling and encourage malingering and bad work habits.

10. Name three to five of your top priorities for government. Make the state more business attractive. Find ways to develop Quonset without adverse impact on Narragansett Bay, our most valuable natural asset. Revamp education to make it less unwieldy and unfair economically and educationally. Elect a governor and General Assembly of people who put the state and its citizens first and not themselves and their cronies.

The really sad thing is that one of the nicest qualities about our state, its smallness and therefore hominess, for want of a better word, is also its biggest detriment. When everybody knows everybody and is connected to everybody one way or another and has, over the years, either personally or through family and friends, been benefited by these connections, it is hard to see how truly destructive such inbreeding is. Rhode Islanders need to force themselves to look outside the box of complacency in which they have placed themselves and recognize that the only way things can change or we can save our state is to recognize our own weakness and determine to make a change.